

## A GUIDE FOR GERMAN IMMIGRANTS

by Otto W. Tetzlaff

During the immigration waves of the nineteenth century, handbooks were important materials used in recruiting prospective settlers for the new land. Often these books were quickly put together and of promotional value only, sugarcoating the real difficulties that were awaiting the settlers. Among the exceptional guides in print during the 1840s, however, was one—so far not available in English—published by the C. Schünemann Retail House in Bremen in 1846.<sup>1</sup> Curiously, the author of this book is unknown, but no doubt it was written by someone who was sympathetic to the *Adelsverein*<sup>2</sup> or a similar organization in Antwerp. These organizations had obtained land-holdings in Texas, which they then sold to Europeans desiring to go to America, and the author of this book clearly knew a great deal about how the organizations functioned. Prince Carl von Solms-Braunfels was in Texas as the General Manager of the *Adelsverein* until he was succeeded by John Meusebach, and after Prince Carl returned to Germany he could easily have written the book. The style of his letters (particularly his cumbersome descriptions) is similar to the style of the handbook; more definite proof that he was the author is lacking, however.

Under the auspices of the *Adelsverein*, the settlers coming to Texas were a protected group; in addition to stressing the difficulties which lay ahead, the handbook gave the emigrant valuable information on the history and topography of the new land, and a description of the cultural and political conditions that existed in Texas at the time. Clearly outlined in the book are the directives to and responsibilities of the emigrants who accepted the sponsorship of the *Adelsverein*, the *Adelsverein's* obligation to supply the settlers, for a price, transportation to the new country and the equipment they would require for a new start, and its commitment to build churches, schools, and communities to benefit the emigrant.

The *Adelsverein*, which was incorporated with an investment of \$80,000 by five sovereign princes and twenty noblemen of Germany, stated in the handbook their purposes as being:

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To improve the lot of the working class who are without employment, thus controlling their increasing impoverishment;

To unite the emigrants by giving them protection through this Association in order to ease their burden by mutual assistance;

To maintain contacts between Germany and the emigrants, and to develop maritime trade by establishing business connections;

To find a market for German craft in these settlements, and to provide a market in Germany for the products of these colonies. (Pp. 87-88)

Consequently, while the *Adelsverein* did hope to regain their investment in Texas, it also seems that they were concerned with raising the standard of living for the emigrant as well.

In the contract between the prospective settler and the *Adelsverein*, the settler who paid 98 Gulden or 56 Thaler (Prussian currency) received, in addition to transportation and food from Europe to New Braunfels,

1. a log cabin not exceeding 60 Gulden in cost, or building materials for a house;
2. 320 acres of land for a family, or 160 acres for a single man, 17 years and older;
3. fencing material and seeds for 15 acres of land;
4. the availability of a community church, one or several schools with free admission, and a hospital, also with free services;
5. the establishment of a grain mill, a saw mill, and a cotton gin for the community.

The terms for those joining the emigration society in Antwerp were not much different. For 80 Gulden (and \$1.50 landing fee), prospective settlers were promised passage to Texas and food. But for an additional payment of 1,000 francs or 500 Gulden, the prospective settler could also receive

1. transportation and food to Castroville;
2. a Mexican-style house (32 feet long, 16 feet wide);
3. 320 acres of land per family, or 160 acres for a single man, 17 years and older;
4. two oxen, two milk cows with calves, 12 chickens, a plow and one wagon.

It is remarkable that from the beginning arrangements were made by the *Adelsverein* that in every settlement of 100 families, 640 acres of land were to be reserved for the establishment of churches. Parcels of these 640 acre lots could then be sold to cover the cost of building suitable structures. Additionally, provisions for public schools were also made, and reading, writing, and arithmetic were to be taught in both English and German.

Although the German word *Kolonie* was used in describing the future German settlements, the *Adelsverein* did not attempt to establish a territory for a German principality under foreign sovereignty; rather, the immigrants were advised in the handbook to learn the English language as soon as possible, become American citizens, and exercise their rights under their new republican constitution.

Indeed, the *Adelsverein* had grandiose plans. It was anticipated that through the organization's effort, six thousand families would be settled on the land originally obtained by a German from Kassel, Henry Francis Fisher

(Fischer). Fisher, in connection with another immigrant, Burkard Müller, had failed to attract settlers and was glad to turn over the land, equal in size to the Kingdom of Saxony, to the *Adelsverein* for a profit. Needless to say, the *Adelsverein* also failed to transport six thousand families to Texas. Although the venture began with enthusiasm—thirty ships left Bremen and Antwerp between August and December, 1845—shortly thereafter, the enthusiasm subsided, and while immigration did continue, it fell short of the great expectations of the *Adelsverein*.

Despite the *Adelsverein*'s organizational attempts, emigration from Germany was no easy venture, nor was establishing a homestead in Texas made any simpler through the *Adelsverein*'s supplying of materials and equipment. The immigrants had to endure hardship and danger during the long voyage from Bremen to Galveston. One immigrant reports:

We were almost as uncomfortable as the dogs. The boat was jammed with passengers and their luggage so that you could hardly find a place on the floor to lie down at night. I firmly believe that a strong wind would have drowned us all.<sup>3</sup>

And even upon arriving in Galveston after sixty to eighty days at sea, the new settler found no wonderland waiting. Under the most adverse and hazardous conditions, the immigrants now had to make their way into the interior of Texas to their final destinations, a trip that often took weeks to make and whose dangers are alluded to in the following passage from the handbook about the killing of two Germans:

The murders of two Germans, Captain von Wrede and Lieutenant Claren, have especially caused great concern about the safety of the pioneer in the settlements of the Association. However, reliable news from Texas reports that those two unfortunate men had been careless; they had made the trip from New Braunfels to Austin, fifty-five English miles and almost twelve German miles, with a very small group; there were only three persons. They dared to cross a yet unsettled region with hills which were still inhabited by the Indians. They had open fires for preparing their meals, became separated from their horses, and chose as their night encampment a place close to heavy underbrush which they had not investigated. (P. 112)

What the settlers found at the end of their journey was often less than they had left behind:

We moved into our own house [after six months of staying with friends]. This was a miserable little hut, covered with straw and having six sides, which were made out of moss. The roof was by no means water-proof, and we often held an umbrella over our bed when it rained at night, while the cows came and ate the moss. Of course, we suffered a great deal in the winter. No one can imagine what a degree of want there was of the merest necessities of life.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, although venison was readily available in Texas, not all German immigrants were good shots, and before the first crop could be harvested, many ate nothing but bread made from crudely ground corn and baked in a skillet if there was no stove available.

Despite the *Adelsverein's* stated purpose of easing the settler's burden by "mutual assistance," the new settler was encouraged to isolate himself by moving away from the cities, settling in the virgin country away from all civilization. Thus, since the land was very thinly populated, the settler taking the *Adelsverein's* advice found that his next neighbor might live five to seven miles away, or further. Those who did remain in one of the few settlements or towns found employment only as hostlers, cooks, and waiters, lacking as they did a trade or any vocational skills. Single men outnumbered single women by a large ratio, and in order to encourage young females to come across the ocean, the author of the handbook stated that "in Texas, wealth and beauty are less prerequisite than in our society. It is no rare occasion when thirteen year old girls get married" (p. 40).

In addition to pragmatic advice, the handbook also attempted to comment on Texas culture. It seems that no business deal was made without the consumption of alcoholic beverages, which were made even more potent by the unscrupulous addition of such extra ingredients as Spanish pepper, cockleburrs, tobacco leaves, Jimson weed, buckeyes, thorn apples, henbane, opium, and belladonna (pp. 38-39). One does not know whether the following observation is based on hearsay or not, but it is quite clearly a warning against the intemperate use of alcohol:

The vice of drunkenness has reached the highest level here, and the number of those selling alcoholic beverages is beyond all belief. This type of business offers the best opportunity to get rich quickly. In no other country is more alcohol being consumed in relation to the population than here. One of the major causes may be the poor quality of drinking water, and the rapid change of the weather. For this reason, hard liquor is considered a medicine and a preservative of good health. Furthermore, the largest part of the population is single, and for room and board, these bachelors depend on the public eating establishments where the proximity of liquor is inviting. In married life, where husband and wife all too often exceed the level of moderation in the consumption of alcohol, even the children get used to it at an early age in order to inure the body to the effects of bad weather. (P. 38)

The author continues that it is in "bad taste" to refuse a drink, and consequently, "it frequently happens that man ceases to be human and sinks to the level of an animal" (p. 38).

While this handbook does give a thorough description of Texas topography, the book may be confusing to read on account of the arbitrary switching of references to distance and measuring units. For example, when one reads geographic descriptions of the Texas coast, the length of the various rivers, and the distances from one city to another, the author sometimes gives the measurements in American miles, and at other times in German *Meilen*. It is difficult for the reader to ascertain accurate distances, because at the time the metric system was not used for distances and acreage surveying in Germany. The geographic mile, which was widely used in Germany, measures 7420.438 meters, as compared to the American mile, which measures 1609.34 meters.

Additionally, the mile as used in Germany differed from state to state, in Bavaria being 7420.438 meters, in Württemberg 7448.748 meters, and in Saxony 7500 meters. Therefore, all references to the *German mile* must be interpreted as geographic (7420.438 meters), and the German mile is then about 4.6 times longer than the English mile to which we are accustomed.

German farm land was measured in units called *Morgen* or *Acker*. These units were also not uniform in size within the various German states, and certainly were not identical in size to the American acre. An acre, by American standards, measures 4046.87 square meters; the German *Acker* measured from 2168 to 6503 square meters, depending on whose state preference one accepts. Hence, if one agrees that Prussia's unit measurement was preferred (2553.2 square meters), it can be stated that one American acre is approximately 1.5 times larger than was one *Acker* in Prussian territory.

Today, when one visits the sparkling clean and prosperous towns that were founded by the nineteenth-century German immigrants, it becomes difficult to believe that in those early days in New Braunfels, for instance, the living conditions were as bad as reported by a weary traveler around 1847:

Remained all day in New Brounsfield, [sic] it stands on the west bank of the Comal, a stream formed by a spring about a mile above the town. In every respect, it resembles the St. Marks only it is perhaps one third larger. Two or two and a half miles from its source it empties [sic] into the Guadalupe river. In this distance it has a fall of 150 or 200 feet. Some of the finest mill sites in the world. The colony consists of about 400 souls, principally living in the town. A great deal of sickness prevails among them,—particularly those who have recently arrived from Europe. They remained down on the gulf when they were landed, many of them, two months without shelter of any kind—exposed to the rain and the sun—it was truly painful to see the poor emaciated creatures cralling [sic] about. Many have died, yet those who have been here a year or two, and the American citizens are very healthy. I must think one of the chief causes of their sickness is a want of cleanliness in their persons and houses. Many of them men, women and children, are disgustingly filthy and this remark will apply to too many of this country.<sup>5</sup>

The report of a traveler twenty years later, however, notes how the community had improved:

the more settled and thrifty appearance of the country indicated our approach to the German settlement of New Braunfels. . . . This whole region . . . is settled very largely by old country Germans, and they have left their impress of industry, order and economy on this section, as they have always done wherever they have found a home in the new world.<sup>6</sup>

Another comment, similarly expressing the progress of the German settlers in New Braunfels, confirms the latter report:

The main street of the town, which we soon entered upon was very wide—three times as wide, in effect, as Broadway in New York. The houses . . . were furnished with verandahs and gardens. . . . We were—in short, we were in Germany. . . . The gentlemen . . . were all educated, cultivated, well-bred, respectful, kind and affable men. All were natives of

Germany. . . . It was delightful to meet again troops of children, with satchels and knapsacks of books and little kettles of dinner, all with ruddy, cheerful faces, the girls especially so, with their hair braided neatly, and without caps or bonnets, smiling and saluting us 'guten morgen' as we met. Nothing so pleasant as that in Texas before, hardly in the South.<sup>7</sup>

Yet despite the hardships and the handicaps these earliest settlers faced, in their letters back home to the Duchy of Oldenburg, the Münsterland, or Württemberg, for example, they described Texas as immeasurably beautiful, with enchanting scenery and an Italian-like climate. It was perhaps these romantic descriptions of Texas, minimizing the settlers' hardships, in addition to promotional materials such as this handbook, which account for the widespread interest in Texas. Indeed, one early poet called Texas "God's world immaculate,"<sup>8</sup> but Hoffmann von Fallersleben in his poem, "Der Stern nach Texas," perhaps best captures the essence of Texas's appeal:

On to Texas! On to Texas!  
Where the star in the blue field  
A new world indicates,  
Every heart for right and freedom  
And for truth it animates—  
There my spirit yearns to go.<sup>9</sup>

## NOTES

1. *Der Auswanderer nach Texas. Ein Handbuch und Rathgeber für Die, welche sich in Texas ansiedeln wollen, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Derer, welche sich dem Mainzer oder Antwerpener Verein anvertrauen* (Bremen: C. Schünemann, 1846). All quotations from this source will be cited by giving the appropriate page numbers in the text. The book has been translated into English by Otto W. Tetzlaff, and is awaiting publication.

2. Known by its official name, *Verein zum Schutze deutscher Einwanderer in Texas*, it was officially organized on April 9, 1844, by five sovereign princes and twenty noblemen: Duke of Nassau, Protector of the Association; Duke of Sachsen-Meiningen; Duke of Sachsen-Coburg-Gotha; Prince of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt; Landgrave of Hessen Homburg; Prince Friedrich of Preußen; Prince Moritz von Nassau; Prince zu Leiningen; Prince zu Neuwied; Prince zu Solms-Braunfels; Prince zu Colloredo-Mansfeld; Prince zu Schöenburg-Waldenburg; Prince Alexander zu Solms-Braunfels; Prince Carl zu Solms-Braunfels; Count Neu-Leiningen-Westerburg; Count Friedrich Alt-Leiningen-Westerburg; Count Victor Alt-Leiningen-Westerburg; Count Christian Neu-Leiningen-Westerburg; Count Ysenburg-Meerholz; Count Hatzfeld; Count Knyphausen; Count Renesse; Count Lilienberg; Count Colloredo-Mansfeld; Count Carl zu Castell (p. 87). Although reports on the founding of the *Adelsverein* are plentiful, this handbook is the only contemporary source which bothers to identify accurately the men responsible for its organization. Chester and Ethel H. Geue in *A New Land Beckoned* (Waco: Texian Press, 1966), and again, Ethel H. Geue in *New Homes in a New Land* (Waco: Texian Press, 1970), state that the *Verein* was organized by fourteen German princes and noblemen on April 20, 1842, in Biebrich on the Rhine (pp. 2 and 12 respectively). Robert Penniger, *Fest-Ausgabe zum fünfzigjährigen Jubiläum der Deutschen Kolonie Friedrichsburg* (Fredericksburg, Texas, 1896), drawing on *Handbuch für deutsche Auswanderer* (Bremen, 1845), the *Neu-Braunfelser Zeitung* (May 27,

1870), and reminiscences of the still-living John Meusebach, lists both the 1842 and 1844 groups of founders (pp. 41-43), with slight variances from the list above (Penniger includes one woman, the widowed Countess von [zu] Isenburg-Meerholz, on both lists). He also gives a full history of the *Adelsverein*, pp. 22-55.

3. Caroline von Hinüber, "Life of German Pioneers in Early Texas," *Texas State Historical Association Quarterly* 2 (1899): 227. An actual shipwreck was reported in Geue, *A New Land Beckoned*, pp. 6ff.

4. Von Hinüber, "Life of German Pioneers," p. 229.

5. William A. McClintock, "Journal of a Trip Through Texas and Northern Mexico in 1846-47," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 34 (1930-31): 34-35.

6. H. H. McConnell, *Five Years a Cavalryman: Or Sketches of Regular Army Life on the Texas Frontier Twenty Odd Years Ago* (Jacksboro, Texas: J. N. Rogers, 1889), p. 38.

7. Frederick L. Olmsted, *The Slave States*, "Journey Through Texas" (New York, 1959), pp. 130-133.

8. Charles Sealsfield, *The Cabin Book, or Sketches of Life in Texas*, translated from the German by Professor Ch. Fr. Mersch (New York: J. Winchester, 1844), p. 27.

9. Translation of first verse by Ashbell Smith Professor W. P. Lehmann. Professor Lehmann gives the German text in his article in this volume.